

Executive Summary of the results of the online consultation on the European Heritage Label

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Executive Summary

Context

The European Heritage Label was launched in 2007 by various European countries as an intergovernmental initiative. It aims to "strengthen the support of European citizens for a shared European identity and to foster a sense of belonging to a common cultural space". To be awarded the Label, heritage sites must highlight their European significance and a plaque bearing the Label logo is mounted at the entrance to such sites.

Currently 66 sites have obtained the label in 18 European participating countries (17 EU Member States, plus Switzerland). The full list of participants and sites are detailed in Annex three. On 20 November 2008, the EU Council called on the Commission to draft a proposal to transform the European Heritage Label into an official EU initiative¹ in order to make the label more visible and effective. The Commission has launched an impact study – including a public consultation – to assess whether the EU should get involved and whether it can add something of value to the European Heritage Label.

Methodology

The online consultation was carried out between 20th March and 15th May 2009, via the Europa website http://ec.europa.eu/culture/our-programmes-and-actions/doc1983_fr.htm. It was open to everybody who wanted to complete a survey questionnaire and was available in six languages (French, English, Spanish, German, Italian and Polish). It was designed to provide a combination of 'closed' and 'open' questions, covering four key domains – attitudes towards the Label; the uniqueness of the Label; engagement and involvement of a specific target group (Young People); and practical considerations for the operation of the Label. The analysis undertaken provided quantitative assessments relating to those 'closed' questions, alongside more detailed qualitative analysis of the 'open' questions. In relation specifically to the qualitative nature of the advice gathered, the analysis sought to capture all comments made and to subsequently cluster comments according to key themes and reflect these in a final concluding chapter of the report.

Participation

The consultation was open to all interested parties from across the European Union and beyond. In total, 220 organisations and individuals participated in the on-line consultation, with a further 6 written responses received, which were also taken into account within the analysis.

Contributions were received from respondents based in 26 different countries. Of further interest is the fact that, of countries participating in the EHL presently, there were no respondents from Hungary, Lithuania, Malta or Slovenia while, of EU countries not participating in the EHL there were no respondents from Denmark. Notwithstanding this, the survey is representative of the views of those strongly interested in the EHL currently (i.e. respondents based in the participating countries), and also of those who are interested in participating in the EHL in the future (i.e. respondents based in countries such as Germany and the UK). 55% of respondents originated from countries currently participating, 37% from non-participating countries and 8% from non-identified countries.

¹ <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=OJ:C:2008:319:0011:0012:EN:PDF>

Key findings from the consultation analysis

- **Familiarity with the EHL** – 58% of respondents were previously unaware of the EHL. Private individuals who responded were the least likely group to be aware of the EHL compared to organisations and public authorities.
- **Reinforcing European identity and citizenship** - 89% of all respondents believed that the EHL could have the effect of reinforcing European citizenship through raised awareness of shared heritage, the encouragement of visits to these sites, and education concerning the cultural inheritance of Europe.
- **Distinctiveness of the Label** - With regard to this, a common response referred to the potential learning culture associated with the scheme, with the EHL embedding learning as a core aim particularly with reference to young people. The EHL could also be distinctive because of identifying sites of symbolic importance rather than aesthetic qualities.
- **Engaging with young people** – while the consultation itself was not successful in engaging with many young people, the messages received from the strong majority of respondents is that the Label can and should engage with young citizens as a core objective, particularly by working in partnership with schools and designing communication initiatives targeting young citizens. Cultural activities and exchanges, guided visits, internet projects and virtual museums were all proposed by respondents as means of engaging young people. There was a common recognition that media and publicity support, especially through the web, would be important for developing the interest of young people.
- **Permanence of the Label** - Considering the practical arrangements for the Label, respondents commented on the issue of the length of time for which the EHL should be awarded. No clear consensus emerged, with 54% of respondents perceiving that the Label should be granted on a permanent basis and 46% feeling that it should be time-limited. However, it is also notable that 91% of those respondents preferring the time-limited option believed that it should be renewable.
- **Extensiveness of the Label** - 48% of respondents believed that between 5 and 10 sites should be allocated per country. However, there was a sizeable number (40%) who indicated that more than 10 sites should be allocated per country, while only 12% perceived that fewer than 5 sites should be allocated per country. There was also, however, a significant minority view that the number of Labels applied could depend on the size of the country and its role in European history. Similarly, a minority view proposed that instead of applying an 'arbitrary limitation' through assigning a set number of sites per country, the number of Labels assigned should depend on the "offer" available in each country.
- **The EHL adding value** – respondents provided clear support for the Label in adding value to heritage and culture, with the following areas commonly cited as of importance:
 - The dissemination of European values amongst custodians and stakeholders.
 - The contribution toward a shared or common identity.
 - Supporting the growth of 'cultural' tourism.
 - Supporting learning, especially of young people.
 - Raised awareness of the diversity of cultural heritage.

Where a minority of respondents considered that the Label would afford no added value this was linked to the scheme being seen as an administrative burden or regarded as overlapping with existing schemes.

- **Selection criteria** - Respondents stressed the need for transnationality to be embedded in selection criteria for the Label. Associated with this was the popular notion of networking of sites. Additionally, a majority saw the importance of criteria to reflect social and cultural qualities, the contribution of a site to Europe's development, as well as practical qualities such as accessibility and good condition of heritage.
- **The role of the EU 'adding value'** - 90% of respondents believed that the Label would benefit from closer involvement by the EU. Of the 10% who did not see 'added value' from EU level intervention, the most commonly held views stated that the designation of the Label should be determined by regional and national governments. A range of roles for the EU were cited, including promotion; coordination; establishing an agreed set of common selection criteria; setting up a central expert committee to review national selections; ensuring quality assurance is embedded in the Label; and helping establish national committees for the EHL in each participating country that would be responsible, for example, for undertaking monitoring visits to sites, receiving reports and reporting to the central organisation.